

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 IO-13
INT-05 /092 W
-----034059 232227Z /61

R 212030Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY SUVA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7659

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

HICOMTERPACIS SAIPAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SUVA 1267

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

HICOMTERPACIS FOR STATUS LNO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, XP, NH

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NEW HEBRIDES

1. NEWS (THROUGH UK SOURCES) OF REMOVAL (EFFECTIVE 14 JULY) OF BERNARD POTTIER AS FRENCH RESIDENT COMMISSIONER IN NEW HEBRIDES CAUSED SPECULATION IN GOF CIRCLES AND TO SOME LIMITED EXTENT AMONG DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES AS TO POSSIBLE MEANING OF THIS ACTION IN VIEW OF FACT THAT POTTIER HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO PORT VILA ONLY A SHORT TIME AGO AND HAD BEEN KNOWN FOR HIS EFFORTS TO CARRY OUT THE PLAN FOR NEW HEBRIDES INDEPENDENCE BY 1980.

2. ACCORDING TO FRENCH CHARGE TELEPHONE CALLS FROM HIM TO HIS AMBASSADOR IN WELLINGTON AND BY HIM TO PORT VILA REVEALED
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THAT "SACKING" OF POTTIER AND REPLACEMENT BY INSPECTOR GENERAL ROBERT, UNTIL RECENTLY IN NOUMEA, WAS RESULT OF "BUREAUCRATIC VENDETTA" BETWEEN PAUL DIJOU, PRESENT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR OVERSEAS DEPARTMENTS AND TERRITORIES, AND HIS PREDECESSOR OLIVIER STIRN WHO HAD APPOINTED "HIS FRIEND" POTTIER SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FROM FRENCH GOVERNMENT.

3. ACTING ON INSTRUCTIONS FRENCH CHARGE DELIVERED NOTE TO DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITH OPERATIVE PARAGRAPHS FOLLOWS:

"THE FRENCH EMBASSY PRESENTS ITS COMPLIMENTS TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HAS THE HONOR TO REPORT THAT MR. BERNARD POTTIER, FRENCH RESIDENT COMMISSIONER IN THE NEW HEBRIDES, HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM HIS POST AND RECEIVED ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT EFFECTIVE JULY 14, 1978. HE IS REPLACED BY INSPECTOR GENERAL ROBERT.

THIS MEASURE HAS BEEN MOTIVATED BY INTERNAL CIVIL SERVICE REASONS AND HAS NO BEARING WHATSOEVER ON THE CONTINUING DETERMINATION OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT TO LEAD, TOGETHER WITH OUR BRITISH PARTNERS, THE ISLANDS TO INDEPENDENCE. MR. ROBERT, IF ANYTHING WILL STRESS EVEN MORE FORCEFULLY THIS POLICY WHICH WILL ALSO BE EMPHASIZED DURING AUGUST WHEN MR. PAUL DIJOUD, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR OVERSEAS DEPARTMENT AND TERRITORY WILL MAKE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE FWFFO MEET THE LEADERS OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES." (WORD "ALL" WAS UNDERLINED IN FRENCH NOTE.)

4. FRENCH CHARGE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE IS INDEED CONVINCED THAT DIJOUD INTENDS TO PURSUE VIGOROUSLY PLAN FOR NEW HEBRIDES INDEPENDENCE 1980.

5. CHARGE SAID ALSO THAT HE WAS EMBARRASSED BEING CAUGHT UNAWARE OF THE CHANGES IN THE NEW HEBRIDES AND LAMENTED THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS WAS THE RESULT OF RIVALRY AND TOTAL LACK OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE SECRETARIAT FOR OVERSEAS TERRITORIES IN PARIS.

6. UNDP OFFICIAL WHO WAS IN PORT VILA PRIOR TO 14 JULY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT POTTIER'S REMOVAL HAD BEEN ORDERED ON 4 JULY BUT NEWS WAS KEPT SECRET TO ALLOW HIM TO PRESIDE OVER 14 JULY CEREMONIES. UK COMMISSIONER HOWEVER HAD BEEN INFORMED IN ADVANCE. ACCORDING TO SOURCE POTTIER'S DEPARTURE WAS GREETED WITH ENTHUSIASM BY FRENCH COLONS WHO HAD REGARDED HIM AS UNSYMPATHETIC TO THEIR CAUSE. (COMMENT: THE VCOLON REACTION MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE SPECULATION IN SUVA AND POSSIBLY OTHER PLACES ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE CHANGE IN 'PERSONNEL' IN PORT VILA.)

7. COMMENT: IT SOUNDS VERY MUCH LIKE ALGERIA ALL OVER AGAIN WITH COLONS MISREADING THE SIGNALS AND THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CHANGING FROM RELUCTANT PARTNER TO AGGRESSIVE SUPPORTER OF THE INDEPENDENCE PLAYS FOR NEW HEBRIDES.

8. INCIDENTALLY SPEC DIRECTOR TOLD US THAT NEW HEBRIDES HAS ALREADY APPLIED FOR OBSERVER STATUS IN THE PACIFIC FORUM

AND THAT THEIR APPLICATION WILL BE CONSIDERED AT THE NEXT FORUM
MEETING IN NUIE 15 - 22 SEPTEMBER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, REORGANIZATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SUVA01267
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780302-0994
Format: TEL
From: SUVA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780731/aaaaazzv.tel
Line Count: 119
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c2a88a6e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1919490
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NEW HEBRIDES
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, XP, NH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c2a88a6e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014